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## ***Developing a Classroom Observation Model based on Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitude\****

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### **Abstract**

To observe teachers different models have been developed and employed by the observers. Some years ago researchers found teachers resentment towards classroom observation. The reason was that in these observation models teachers' preferences had been totally neglected. The recent studies, done in post method period, consolidate the importance of giving priority to teachers' attitudes in general and their preferences in teacher observation in particular. That was when new models flourished in which observers did their best to enter teachers' attitudes. In order to move along the recent advancements in teacher education and to help improve teacher reflection in Iranian educational system, the researchers did an investigation in this regard; to bring teachers' attitudes as important criteria to the field of classroom observation. To this aim the researchers developed a new classroom observation model totally based on teachers' attitudes.

To inquire about teachers' attitude, a two-phase study was conducted. In the first phase an interview survey was conducted with 20 EFL teachers. A content analysis of the transcribed data yielded 26 most frequent items which formed the statements in a yes/no questionnaire. These items were seeking teachers' attitudes about their ideal practice of classroom observation. To check teachers' ideas at large a questionnaire survey was conducted on 161 EFL teachers.

The responses were submitted to SPSS to find the frequencies of the positive and the negative answers to each statement. Then a Chi-square analysis was used to check the significance of the differences found between the percentage of the positive and the negative answers. The analysis proved the significance of all the resulting differences. That was the basis for proposing a new model of teacher observation totally based on teachers' priorities.

**Key words:** Attitude, Observation, Observation model

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher observation is one of the most challenging areas in program management. The most notable challenge has to do with the fact that our efforts are rarely appreciated by the teachers we serve; teachers feel intimidated and threatened by the entire supervisory process because the models of supervision that we have inherited are authoritarian and directive. Teacher observation has traditionally entailed the familiar scenario of nervous teachers trying to perform correctly, while the observer sits at the back ticking items on a checklist and making decisions to what is good and bad teaching. The teacher may receive a point on his or her performance and tries harder to get it right the next time. The whole process of observation, from the instrument used by the observer to different stages of teacher observation, was totally decided upon by the observers and researchers.

Since teacher reflection has acquired prominence in discourse on second language education, a revolution has happened in teacher observation practices. Consequently teaching is becoming more democratic and teachers must be given voice to experience their wishes and concerns. In this situation studies that seek harmonization between and congruence of teachers' interest and the observation techniques are not only desirable but also imperative. That is the reason new models have flourished for classroom observation.

In order to move along the recent advancements in teacher observation the researchers did an investigation in this regard. In their investigation they penetrated into Iranian EFL teachers' psychological reaction to observation and their perception of the necessity of including teacher observation in EFL institutes' program. Finally a new observation model totally based on teachers' perceptions was

developed in order to help remove teachers' negative reactions to teacher observation. Another important point motivating a work in this area was the status of teacher observation in Iran. Teacher observation has not yet occupied the place it deserves, whether in second language classes in schools or in different EFL institutes. This fact necessitated a serious work on this topic. Hopefully the current work will be a gateway for paying enough attention to teacher observation and consequently teacher development in the country. The present study was conducted to serve these purposes. Specifically the study aimed at addressing the following question:

- What is Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards teacher observation?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Notwithstanding the growing emphasis on teacher and classroom observation in teacher education, little by little, researchers found that teachers were not satisfied with the observational process. This made researchers interested in finding out the reasons for this dissatisfaction in order to remove them. They could come up with some reasons for this resentment. The main reasons researchers found were the judgemental, evaluative nature of observations, authoritative role of observers and prescriptive nature of feedbacks.

Wang and Seth (1998) are among the scholars who report that the subjective, judgmental and impressionistic nature of classroom observation is the reason for the bad reputation of classroom observation. In order to change the negative image of classroom observation, they conducted in a study, employing a collaborative approach in teacher observation in China. In this approach, the usual power relationship between observers and teachers was dramatically

changed by giving teachers the opportunity to decide what they would like to do throughout the classroom observation process. This approach created a drastic change in teachers' attitudes towards 'observation'.

In line with this study and because teacher observation was not well received by teachers in Hong-Kong, Lam (2001) conducted a study to find out the reasons behind the adversarial attitudes of educators. The findings of the study revealed that the main reasons for the pressure felt by teachers were the existing primary objective of teacher observation as that of 'teacher evaluation' and the most common pattern practiced as 'principal observes teachers'. Lam inquired teachers' preferences and concluded that respecting their perception of the practice, i.e. including teacher development and peer observation in teacher observation practices, helps in further development of the practice.

Further, Gebhard (1990), Brown (1995) and Stroller (1996) worked extensively on the reasons for the resentment of teachers. They believed that teachers' adversarial attitudes stem from the traditional supervisor-supervisee relationships and the unsystematic and subjective nature of traditional classroom visits that were usually unannounced, supervisor-centred, authoritarian, directive and judgemental. They further attributed teachers' defensiveness and hostility toward observation to the prescriptive nature of feedbacks that lead to a passive role for teachers to follow the prescriptions and keep the responsibility for decision-making with the observer.

They then express the need for implementing a new model of observation as the solution. The overall aim of the new model is to empower the teacher through a transformation of the observation

process in which the teacher becomes an active participant in the observation of his or her own classroom (Brown, 1995). This model is more interactive than directive, more democratic than authoritarian, more teacher-centred than supervisor-centred, more concrete than vague, more objective than subjective and more focused than unsystematic. It also contains constructive feedback and a dialogue between teacher and observer (Stroller, 1996). The new model that meets the criteria specified above is called *clinical supervision* developed by Goldhammer and Cogen in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (The necessity of designing new models, with a greater focus on the collaborative inquiry between teacher and the observer, is further emphasised in Freeman, 1990; Fanselow, 1990; Pica 1994; and Keig & Wagonner 1995).

Changes in teacher observation practices have always been in line with proposing different approaches to observation by researchers. Freeman (1982) compared three approaches to teachers' in-service training and development, i.e. teacher observation. In *Supervisory approach* the observer is a supervisor or an administrator. The evaluative, prescriptive nature of feedback the observer provides and the power relationship between teacher and observer are among the main features of this approach. He then refers to the *Alternative approach* which was developed as an answer to the drawbacks inherent in supervisory approach. Here the observer provides non-judgemental alternatives to what he has seen in the class. Finally in *Non-directive approach*, the observer is an 'understander' of teacher's experiences and goals, which have priority in this approach. Consequently, a supportive relationship in its fullest sense is advocated.

Gebhard (1990) extends upon these models by introducing three other approaches to observation. *Collaborative approach*, *creative approach* and *self-help explorative approach* are three approaches added by Gebhard. Collaborative model requires a sharing of ideas between the teacher and the observer. 'Trying different choices for running the observation, the dynamic role of the supervisor, the priority of freedom and creativity and also using different instruments are among features of Creative model. The aim in Self-help explorative approach is developing self-exploration and awareness-raising in teachers that comes as a result of seeing other peoples teach.

All new approaches proposed were all aimed at moving along the recent advancements in teacher education, i.e. meeting teachers' needs. With this in mind, a significant point motivating the current work is that we live in a different context with different goals of education from those where the existing observation models have been employed, so the necessity of developing an observation model that best suits the preferences of the practicing teachers in the country was deeply felt.

### 3. METHOD

To identify features of the ideal practice of teacher observation, the researcher conducted a two-phase study. The first phase used a qualitative method, i.e. conducting interview, to richly describe teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. The second phase utilized a quantitative method, i.e. questionnaire administration, in order to identify and examine teachers' belief among the population.

### **3.1. Part 1: Qualitative part**

#### **3.1.1. Participants**

The sampling method in this phase of the study was that of criterion-based selection. In this form of sampling the researcher creates a list of the attributes essential to the study and then seeks out participants to match these criteria (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Our criteria were as follows: a) EFL teacher, b) teaches at different institutes of Tehran, c) is English major, d) teaches book one of New Interchange series, e) has the experience of being observed more than 3 times. The research participants in this phase, qualitative phase, of the study are 10 men and 10 women.

#### **3.1.2. Instrumentation**

To get teachers' attitude, the participants of the study participated in a face-to-face individual interview with the researcher.

#### **3.1.3. Procedure:**

The following steps were followed by the researcher for the interview phase of the work.

1. *An interview schedule was created by the researcher.*

This schedule in our study was a set of open-ended questions to evoke response. Appendix 1 includes the complete list of interview questions.

2. *Some appointments were made with the participants of the study.*

3. *The interview was conducted by the researcher.*

The respondents answered to 20 open-ended interview questions in approximately 30 minutes. The language of the

interview and the setting at which the interview was done were according to the priorities of the participants.

4. *The responses were recorded by a tape-recorder with the permission of the participants.*

5. *The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. Finally more than 80 pages of transcripts were obtained.*

### **3.1.4. Data Analysis**

To analyze the interview transcripts, content analysis was used. It yielded 26 items regarding teachers' attitude towards classroom observation, including their perception of the necessity of teacher observation, characteristics of the observer, the way they liked to receive feedback, etc. The total 26 items were included in a questionnaire to be answered by a greater number of teachers in the second phase of the study (see appendix 2 for a sample of the attitude questionnaire).

#### **3.1.4.1. Content analysis and its practical applications**

According to Berelson (1952, p.18) content analysis is 'the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication'. This definition has been widely quoted by many authors (for instance, Busha & Harter, 1980; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990; and Lundman, 2004). All these scholars have introduced texts as the exclusive subject of content analysis. They also have defined text in similar ways. Specifically, Busha and Harter (1980) include interview transcripts as one kind of text on which content analysis is done.

### **3.1.4.2. An overview of concepts in content analysis**

Among the concepts are *unit of analysis*, *meaning unit*, *condensed meaning unit*, *subcategory*, *category* and *theme* (Granheim and Lundman; 2004). According to them *unit of analysis* refers to a variety of objects of study (quoted from Mertens, 1998). They suggest that the most suitable unit of analysis is whole interviews or observational protocols. The concept of *meaning unit* is the constellation of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning. *Condensation* is also introduced in their study as a process of shortening the meaning unit while still preserving the core. Further, they believe a *category*, the core feature of qualitative content analysis, is a group of content that shares a commonality (also cited in Krippendorff, 1980). A category often includes a number of *sub-categories*. And finally the concept of *theme* has multiple meanings and is a way to link the underlying meanings together in categories.

## **3.2. Part 2: Quantitative part**

### **3.2.1. Participants:**

The participants in the second phase of the study were 161 EFL teachers who were teaching at different language institutes in Tehran and other cities where teacher observation is regularly practiced. This sample included 69 male and 72 female respondents. Nineteen respondents failed to indicate their gender. The teaching experience of the respondents ranged from 2 months to 216 months (18 years). The kind of sampling was convenient sampling.

### **3.2.2. Instrumentation:**

The participants filled a yes/no questionnaire containing 26 statement items derived from the content analysis of the transcribed data in the first phase of the study. The respondents were required to choose either yes or no based on their dis/agreements with the items in this part.

### **3.2.3. Procedure**

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered either through a face-to-face contact of the researcher with the specified teachers or through an e-mail contact. A total of 161 questionnaires were returned to the researcher.

### **3.2.4. Data Analysis**

The responses to the questionnaire were fed into SPSS for the analysis. Descriptive statistics were obtained for the results. Also, the frequencies related to each item were calculated and a Chi-Square was used to check the significance of the differences between the positive and negative answers to each item.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Content analysis of the interview text in the present study**

The unit of analysis in this study was the interview text about teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. It was sorted into several categories: teachers' attitude towards the goals of observation, pre-observation, the observation phase, post observation, effective

observer, etc. Each category consists of some sub-categories. For instance, the category 'teacher's attitude towards post observation' is divided into: Do you like to receive feedback?; When do you like to receive feedback?; and how do you like to receive feedback?

The participants' answers to each of these questions were extracted and brought together into one text. Each text was divided into meaning units that were condensed. It means that an attempt was made to reduce the data to the most salient 'statements'. Redundant and superfluous statements were edited out. The process finally 'distilled' the transcript down to the essential statements pertaining to the teachers' attitudes about observation. The tentative condensed meaning units were discussed by the researchers and revised.

Examples of theme, category, and sub-category, meaning units and condensed meaning units are shown in table 4.1.

*Table 4.1. Examples of theme, category, sub-category, meaning unit and condensed meaning unit*

<b>Theme</b>	Teachers' attitude towards classroom observation
<b>Category</b>	Teacher's attitude towards post observation
<b>Sub-category</b>	Teachers' attitude towards the way they like to receive feedback
<b>Meaning unit</b>	I like the observer ask my opinions too. // I want him to respect my ideas. // If he doesn't ask my attitude, then I will be nervous.//
<b>Condensed meaning unit</b>	I prefer to receive feedback from my observer in a negotiative manner.

To find the common condensed meaning units among the transcripts a table was drawn. At the top came the code number of the participants and in the left the condensed meaning units inferred from the transcribed interview of each individual. Common points in different interviews were identified by putting a symbol at the intersection of that particular meaning unit and the number of that individual. In this way a table was drawn for each interview question or sub-category. At the end a counting of the number of the symbols related to each meaning unit was done to find the units with higher frequencies.

Units with higher frequencies were picked up to form the items of a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 26 items related to teachers' ideal practice of teacher observation. The answers of 161 respondents to the questionnaires were analyzed then.

#### **4.2. Data analysis of the questionnaire**

The resulting questionnaire contained 26 yes/no items seeking teachers' attitudes about their ideal practice of classroom observation. To analyse the data, all the responses were submitted to SPSS to find the frequencies of the positive and the negative answers to each statement. Then a Chi-square analysis was used to check the significance of the differences found between the percentage of the positive and the negative answers. The result of the analysis of the questionnaire is summarized in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2.** Result of the analysis of the questionnaire

No.	Items	Agree	Chi-Square	Sig.
1	I prefer both teacher evaluation and teacher improvement as the goals of classroom observation.	77.0	47.01	.00
2	The observer must be an experienced language teacher.	70.0	26.24	.00
3	The observer must be a person with a degree in teaching English.	83.0	71.11	.00
4	The observer must pay attention to the positive points as well as the negative points.	94.0	127.01	.00
5	I prefer to be observed by my friends.	81.0	60.87	.00
6	I don't like to be observed by peers.	71.0	29.57	.00
7	I prefer to receive feedback from my observer in a negotiative manner.	86.0	82.14	.00
8	I prefer to receive feedback from my observer in private.	81.0	63.36	.00
9	I prefer to receive feedback in an informal and friendly situation.	87.0	87.95	.00
10	I prefer to receive feedback both in written and spoken form.	76.0	42.78	.00
11	I prefer to receive feedback immediately after the classroom observation.	60.0	6.76	.00
12	I prefer to be observed directly by the observer not through electronic devices.	75.0	42.78	.00
13	I prefer the observer write qualitatively everything happens in the classroom.	55.0	1.39	.23
14	I prefer the observer use an observation checklist for classroom observation.	60.0	6.76	.009
15	I prefer to be observed by hidden camera in particular sessions.	52.0	.15	.69
16	Lowering the teachers' wage can be a good penalty for weak teachers.	33.5	17.44	.00
17	Decreasing teachers' teaching hours can be a good penalty for weak teachers.	59.0	5.22	.02
18	Twice a term is a good interval for classroom observation.	80.0	58.44	.00
19	I prefer to be observed in the middle sessions of the term.	71.0	29.57	.00
20	It is more informative for the observers to observe a full session of teaching.	61.5	8.50	.004
21	I prefer to know the time I will be observed.	63.0	10.44	.001
22	Teacher observation must be an integral part of the institute's educational program.	65.0	13.72	.00
23	Teacher observation causes stress in teachers.	75.0	40.75	.00
24	Teacher observation causes stress in learners.	68.0	20.18	.00
25	The observer should sit in a non-intrusive place in the classroom.	84.0	73.79	.00
26	I like the observer ask the learners' ideas about my teaching.	84.0	73.79	.00

### 4.3. Discussion

It has been a common phenomenon that teachers do not welcome classroom observation although it is widely accepted as an important component in teacher development and teacher evaluation. To understand this common phenomenon and to help remove teachers' resentment by considering their perception of teacher observation, the present study investigated educators' perceptions and opinions on different areas of classroom observation. A discussion of teachers' ideas regarding these areas is followed. To gain a deeper insight to teachers' attitudes, some items are discussed with reference to the interview transcripts.

#### 4.3.1. Necessity of teacher observation

The first statement in the questionnaire checked teachers' attitude toward the necessity of the inclusion of teacher observation in language institutes. Most respondents identified that classroom observation be an integral part of each institute's educational program. When asked why they like teacher observation be included in their language institutes, the respondents referred to different reasons such as the role of observation as

- a means of attending to the need teachers have for assistance in understanding their classroom behaviours, classroom dynamics and teaching techniques;
- a way of engaging teachers and administrators in a dialogue about effective practice;
- a mechanism for assessing areas requiring improvement;
- vehicle for fostering understanding about unique issues teachers face as well as for expressing appreciation for work they do; and
- a tool for evaluating the teachers' performance.

Some example quotations from the interview transcripts mentioned by the teachers are:

*Teacher observation is really needed. Actually I've learned a lot from the observations and have applied them in my teaching ;Teachers need a kind of control over their teaching ; Teacher observation is especially needed for the novices, it helps them learn a lot ; If I don't be observed, I won't care about the way I teach; It helps us improve both in language proficiency and in the theoretical understanding of teaching; It provides opportunities for teachers to build their knowledge and skills; It helps us make sure of the improvements in our teaching; We need an observer who has a critical eye. He/she better recognizes the problems in my teaching; and observation is needed for teacher evaluation.*

On the whole 65% of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the inclusion of teacher observation in their language institutes' schedule. Based on the attitudes of the majority of teachers and in accordance with what has been proved regarding the importance of teacher observation in literature, we found that the positive perception of teachers towards the inclusion of classroom observation is due to the practical use of classroom observation in their work environment. When educators find that they benefit from the practice, they would have more positive perceptions of it. So It is suggested that teacher observation stay as or become an integral part of the EFL institutes as one of the primary tools to gain important information about techniques, student engagement, use of materials, adherence to curricula and other classroom practice issues. To not

observe is to miss this set of data and therefore miss an opportunity to improve and refine educational services.

#### 4.3.2. Teachers' psychological reactions to the observation

Though the majority of the respondents feel satisfied with the inclusion of teacher observation in their institutes' schedule, most of them believe that teacher observation causes stress in both teachers and learners. One interviewee reflected upon the time he is being observed as *the most stressful moments of his class period*. This kind of feeling and the resulting aversion of Iranian teachers towards classroom observation are in line with what has been repeatedly mentioned in the literature, also one of the real motives for conducting this research.

When asked about the reasons for their stress while being observed, most of the interviewees maintained that the classrooms were their own private territory and that the presence of an outsider had an adverse effect on their performance and that of their learners- no matter how experienced they were, their eyes would be constantly drawn to that figure sitting at the back of the room scribing furiously on a note-pad. Their inevitable feeling in that circumstance was that they thought they would be criticized by the observer, that he or she would not like the way they did things or that they were somehow doing something wrong.

Other reasons mentioned by the interviewed teachers refer to different aspects of teacher observation:

*It is the observer who often tells us what is good and bad according to some prescriptions; Observation causes a kind of distraction. When observer comes,*

*learners don't cooperate any more; He is an outsider; the way he looks at me and writes something in front of my eyes is terrible. I lose my self confidence ; He considers penalties for weak teachers ; This penalty ruins the benefits of observation; I have stress due to the penalties: dismissal, lowering the wage; He cares about the trivial things that embarrass teachers; Learners think that they are being evaluated and this causes stress ; I think he is here to find my mistakes ; The teacher is stressed to have a good performance. That affects the way he teaches and makes it artificial; the observers are looking for the negative points and not the positive ones; and the observer brings lots of books and papers. This causes pressure.*

From the reasons mentioned by the interviewees it can be concluded that the stress mainly stems from the traditional approach to teacher observation; subjective nature of classrooms visits that maybe usually unannounced, directive and judgemental. Among the reasons they refer to different aspects of classroom observation: the characteristics of the observer, the ways in which teachers are observed, the ways in which they receive feedback and what happens to them afterward as a result of their weak performance while being observed.

In this situation one of the greatest challenges we face is how to change the negative attitudes towards supervision around so that teachers can reap the rewards and benefits - in the form of professional development and improved instruction. Some teachers suggest that teachers *forget that there is an outsider in their class. Look at him as if he is a student. Even ask him to participate in the*

*class activities*. A glance at the reasons mentioned by the teachers themselves reveals that in order to remove the stress teachers feel while being observed, their priorities must be considered in conducting the whole process of observation, from the characteristics of the observers to the punishments teachers receive.

#### **4.3.3. Objectives**

Majority of teachers indicated that they would like to have both teacher evaluation and teacher improvement as the goals of teacher observation. They believe that there should be a kind of authority to tell them what they are expected to do and also help them improve.

Actually there are strong voices in the field of education for the synthesis of teacher development and teacher evaluation (Poster & Poster, 1993; cited in Lam, 2001). Maybe one source of teachers' resistance to classroom observation is teacher evaluation and supervision as the mere goal of classroom visits; the point that is repeatedly mentioned in the literature (Lam, Yim, & Lam, 1999 cited in Lam, 2001).

Such combination of teacher observation goals based on teachers' attitudes can ameliorate the resistance of teachers to classroom observation. Though linking teacher evaluation to professional development is a difficult task (Lam, 2001), results of evaluation must be used to further teacher development. It should not be a dead end or an empty exercise. The results must lead to meaningful programs for teacher development.

#### **4.3.4. Time and frequency of observation and teachers' awareness of the time**

Majority of teachers preferred to be observed twice a term, in the middle sessions. They reasoned:

*I prefer 'twice a term', because there should be a kind of continuity in classroom observations. That helps us improve; and the observer should give us enough time and compare our two performances to see the changes in our teaching.*

Further they prefer the middle sessions of the term for classroom observation and reason that:

*Not at the very beginning sessions of the term. The teacher is not yet well familiar with the learners. Not at the very last sessions. We are in a hurry to finish the book; and once near the beginning of the term, once near the end. Then the observer can have a good impression of what the teacher does.*

The quotations clearly show that teachers would like to be given time to create appropriate changes in their classroom performance. They don't like to be observed in shorter intervals or to be evaluated based on their performance in a single observation session.

Based on teachers' priorities it is suggested that classroom observations occur twice a term at appropriate intervals in the middle sessions of the term. Appropriate intervals give the teacher time to incorporate the observers' comments into his/her lesson preparation

and delivery; an opportunity to create appropriate changes in the way they teach. Further this regularity creates a kind of continuity in classroom visits that better helps teachers improve. This regular time interval also provides an opportunity for the observer to reinforce what the teacher is doing well and to build confidence.

The respondents to the questionnaire also had a similar idea to that of the interviewees regarding their awareness of the time they will be observed. The interviewees like to know the time and say:

*If I know the time of observation, I'll prepare learners for the outsider who comes. I tell them we have a guest today; If I don't know the time of observation, this will cause intrusion; If I don't know the time of observation, then I think he is in my room just to find my mistakes; My class is my territory. The observer should ask my permission; and this is a kind of respect for the teachers to tell them the time; otherwise teachers feel something is being imposed on them.*

Making teachers aware of the time of teacher observation is another suggestion for the removal of teachers' aversion to the classroom visits. Another important point to remember is that most of the interviewees preferred to be told about the observation just before the class and reasoned that this avoids any special preparation for the class activities on part of teachers just due to the presence of the observer and consequently avoids a kind of artificiality in classroom environment. As teachers prefer it is proposed that the observer and the teacher have a brief talk just before the class session, that the appointments be setup in advance with the teacher and scheduled at

teachers' convenience. This kind of respect for the teachers' rights helps put a step forward to a kind of reflective teaching.

#### **4.3.5. The ideal pattern of classroom observation**

The questionnaire respondents were asked about the ways they would like to be observed. The majority disagreed with the idea that the observer bring a tape recorder or camera in the classroom for teacher observation. Teachers think *these electronic devices make the classroom environment artificial. They cause distraction and make classroom management difficult.* The respondents also look at the use of electronic devices as evidence used by the observers against their mistakes. This idea goes back to the negative view they have towards classroom observation; that they are going to be victims of teacher supervision. Based on teachers' ideas it is suggested that the observers avoid videotaping of classes. This attracts the attention of the teacher and the learners and subsequently distracts the normal activities of the classroom.

When asked whether they like to be observed indirectly through hidden camera in particular sessions or not, a significant difference could not be found between the positive and the negative answers. A large number of teachers disagreed with the idea of hidden camera in their classes (52%) compared to 48% who agreed with the hidden camera. But this difference is not large enough to be the basis of any claim. Some prefer to be observed directly by the observer; because they think that the observer can have a feeling of classroom environment, what cannot be achieved using camera. They think there are some traces of appreciation, success and maybe defeat in learners' eyes that must be felt directly by the observer. Others oppose the use of hidden camera because they do not see it as ethical. On the other

hand some teachers prefer the use of hidden camera in their classes and maintain that it is less threatening than the presence of the observer.

Just like the interviewed teachers the questionnaire respondents prefer to be observed by an experienced teacher and a person who has a degree in language teaching. They like experienced teachers because *the points he/she mentions are useful; and experienced teacher helps a lot*. Further the observer must have a degree in language teaching because *he knows what a sense of teaching is; and if he doesn't have a degree in teaching, he/she cannot evaluate my teaching*.

The respondents also really welcomed to be observed by their friends. They referred to some interesting points:

*If I'm observed by a friend, I will have more self-confidence; a friend doesn't take stand and doesn't have a negative attitude towards you teaching; we learn a lot from each other. For instance when I go to his class I see the problems in my teaching. It creates an informal and not artificial situation; and I feel relaxed with a friend. There is a kind of positive negotiation.*

The reasons mentioned by the interviewees regarding the priority of being observed by a friend clearly show the ways they like to be observed. It can be concluded that they like an observer who is like a friend to them, negotiates with them, tries to improve the teacher and him/her self through the observation of teachers, observes teachers informally and friendly and doesn't look down at the teachers. All these points create a convenient situation for the teacher in the classroom and remove any opposing feeling on the part of the teachers while being observed. That can be a good idea if we include

observations by the classroom teachers' friends in our language institute' programs and consider the features they attributed to the observation by their friends in our classroom observations.

Even though there is a wide emphasis in the literature on the benefits gained from peer observation (Brown, 1995), most of the teachers in the present study have a negative attitude towards peer observation. They think that *peers take stand* and oppose peer observation because *there is a kind of competition between teachers in language institutes* and because they see peer observation as *a means of assessment*. Also *most of the time suggestions of peers will be confused with those of the supervisor*.

The negative opinion of teachers towards peer observation is an important point to remember. Teachers don't like their colleagues assess them and take stand towards their way of teaching. The suggestion is that either to improve teachers' look at peer observation by removing what causes their resentment or to remove peer observation from our language institutes.

#### **4.3.6. The place and the time period the observer sits**

Most of the respondents indicated that a non-intrusive place, maybe the last row of the classroom, is the best place for the observers to sit. Teachers prefer the observer not distract their attention and that of their learners throughout the class period and *sit like a student*. According to teachers' priority a non-intrusive place is offered for the observers to sit. If intrusion is created in the classroom by the presence of the observer, a teachers' performance cannot be expected to be a representative sample of his performance in other sessions.

Another priority of teachers is that the observer stay for a whole session. The interviewed teachers believed:

*The class is a community. Everybody in the class has a certain role. Maybe in a very short time I can't elicit the role of one student. A short time just represents part of the class life; Sitting for a full session helps observers better consider different aspects of the classroom; Maybe one part of the class time needs more of an activity; The observer had better sit an entire class to make real judgements ;The teacher's performance in a short while should not be interpreted as a whole ; When the observer enters the class, at first I have some stress, little by little it decreases ;and five minutes is not a true sample of the teacher's performance .*

Just as teachers prioritize it is proposed that observers stay an entire class. Since the practice of the classroom is meaningful from the beginning till the end and also a full session of observation helps observers be fair in their judgements. This point has been repeatedly mentioned in studies on teacher observation. As Boyd (2001) indicates the goal of teacher observation is to obtain a representative sample of a teacher's performance in the classroom. Observers cannot accomplish this goal with an observation of only a short while in the class.

#### **4.3.7. The way to be observed**

A greater number of teachers are satisfied with the observer's use of a checklist in classroom observation. But there was not a significant difference in the number of the positive and negative

answers to the observer's writing qualitatively of what happens in the language classrooms. To some of the teachers' ideas the use of a checklist helps the observer have a framework in mind. On the contrary the observer's writing qualitatively of what happens in the classroom causes a kind of distraction and is one of the reasons for teachers' aversion to classroom observation. Still others prefer qualitative writing type because it comprehensively covers what happens in the classrooms.

To realize teachers' ideas, we suggest using checklists in classrooms. Checklists have many advantages that have been repeatedly mentioned in the literature on teacher observation (see Frohlin, Spade & Allen, 1985; Thomas, 1987; Allwright, 1988; Gebhard, 1990; Day, 1990; Spada, 1990a; and Spada, 1994). Because there was only a trend in the number of teachers who preferred the observer's qualitative writing we suggest that the observer use a checklist in the classroom and write just brief explanations regarding the positive and negative points in the teacher's performance if needed.

#### **4.3.8. Feedback**

The majority of the respondents are willing to receive feedback immediately after the classroom observation. They have *the tension to know the observer's opinion* and interpreted feedback sessions as *the main part of teacher observation and all its benefit*. One teacher said that *if the observer doesn't talk to me after the class, I go after him. If he doesn't talk with me about my performance, I'll become disappointed of getting benefit from teacher observation*, and another one indicated that *feedback is really needed for improvement*. Teachers' priority is in accordance with what is read in literature on

classroom observation and feedback. Based on teachers' ideas we suggest holding feedback sessions after the classroom observations as integral to improving teacher performance and practice. Also scheduling post observation conferences in close proximity to the observation is critical - teachers want immediate feedback and everyone benefits from a quick turnaround. Immediate feedback is the most valuable thing for teachers.

When asked how they liked to receive feedback the respondents identified their satisfaction with receiving feedback in a friendly and negotiative manner. According to their opinion *a formal approach of giving feedback is disgusting*. They like the observer be just like a friend they can trust. That's when they make sure that the observer would be just there to help them. In this line, participants of this study like a negotiative approach for feedback sessions. They like the observer respect their ideas and ask about their alternatives for the problematic areas in their teaching, also their reasons for what they did in the classroom. They say:

*If he doesn't ask my alternatives, at least he should ask why I did so. Of course I have some reasons for what I did. Maybe there is a kind of misunderstanding. He is not perfect. Maybe he is not right; I like to discuss the points. He should give me the right to talk; He should respect my ideas. We are not enemies; and I like a kind of collaboration with the observer.*

Giving feedback in a friendly and negotiative manner is what has been supported emphatically in the literature on classroom observation and feedback. Feedback sessions should be meaningful interactions involving shared inquiry between teacher and observer; not a top-down critique of a teacher's behaviour as Brown (1995) puts

it. He further emphasizes that a teacher be an active participant in the observation of his or her own classroom by having an honest dialogue with the observer leading to constructive feedback. Negotiation keeps teachers actively engaged with improving their teaching, rather than merely passively listening to advice on how they can improve.

To refer to the importance of negotiation, it is enough to remember that negotiation between teacher and observer forms an integral part of developing teacher autonomy; i.e. a self-directed professional development (Benson, 2001, p. 174, citing Mcgrath, 2000). The benefits inherent in teacher autonomy are varied and significant. According to Little (1995, p.179) successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of effective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers. This kind of collaborative support within the institution leads to teacher autonomy. This creates a need in teachers for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teacher may seek out opportunities over the course of his or her career to develop further. An autonomous teacher works with his or her learners openly and accountably in ways that best stimulate their learning. An autonomous teacher continually searches, in collaboration first and foremost with his or her learners, for better answers to the difficult problems inevitably arising in developing and interpreting learner autonomy further.

Maybe it is a good idea for the observers to give teachers the observation form prior to the post-observation conference meeting so that they can reflect on it before discussing it. Allowing teachers to have time to reflect on the questions that the observer poses allows

them to come up with answers rather than relying on the observer for the answers. The resulting teacher reflection helps teachers develop appropriate knowledge and attitudes for one self as teachers, a kind of personal development through reflection on practice. In this way the outcome of the post observation conference discussion will be an agreement on what the teacher will do to improve his/her teaching. Further post observation meeting brings together the two objectives of evaluation and staff and program development issues and needs.

Based on teachers' priorities and the benefits gained from giving them the right to talk, we would argue that classroom visits should provide an opportunity for teachers to develop their own judgements of what goes on in their own classrooms, should sharpen their awareness of what their pupils are doing and the interaction that takes place in their classes and higher their ability to evaluate their own teaching practices. In other words these visits should as far as possible be developmental rather than judgemental. Here, the focus is on teachers' own judgement. The aim is for the teacher and the observer to work together to solve classroom problems so that the teacher can continue after the course has finished.

The majority of the respondents would like to hear the positive points of their teaching in post observation meeting. They like the positive aspects of their lessons, what went well, be stressed and built on and say *I like to be appreciated; it helps to strengthen the positive points; and if he just tells me the negatives, I will be disappointed*. As teachers prefer, it is suggested that the observers deliver feedback in a positive way; maintain a balance between praise and criticism; be supportive throughout the conference, pointing out and congratulating the teacher on the positive aspects of the lesson; acknowledge and affirm the hard work teacher does. This positive reinforcement helps

teachers adopt new teaching practices. On the other hand criticism and negatives can cause trouble and conflict.

Further, majority of teachers would like to receive feedback in private, *not in front of learners and other teachers*. Considering teachers' preference regarding this point also is strongly recommended to help de-stress what is traditionally a highly stressful process for teachers and turn observation to a positive learning experience for teachers.

Teachers mostly prefer to receive feedback both in written and spoken form. They suggest that the observer give them a copy of the observation checklist to take home and study the recommendations. So it is recommended that the observer give teachers a written copy of the observation for their own files. He can also list the problems teachers have had and then write him/her some suggestions.

#### **4.3.9. Received penalty**

Teacher observation has been frightening and threatening to a great extent due to the penalties followed; *the weak teacher would be dismissed and her/his wage would be decreased*. These penalties and the teachers' thought of what happens after the classroom observation in case he has negative points in his teaching makes him nervous while being observed. In order to approach the goals of classroom observation and turn it to a welcome phenomenon for teachers it is suggested that the observers remove the fuss around teacher observation; not to decrease the teachers' wage; not to dismiss the weak teachers based on a single session observation of his/her classroom. Observers can decrease teachers' teaching hours for a while and give the weak teachers an opportunity for improvement, as

teachers suggested in the questionnaires. In this way teachers can trust in them and make sure that they will not be criticized.

#### 4.3.10. The final grade

The majority of the teachers like the observer ask students' ideas about teachers for the final evaluation of teachers. They think classroom observation in combination with inquiring the learners' ideas of teachers can provide a better picture of teachers' performance in the classroom. They mention *students are the best observers of teachers*; and reason that

*It is the student who has been along with the teacher throughout the term; it has happened many times that the learners referred to some of the weak points that have been unnoticed by the observer; and the observer can't decide just based on the classroom observations.*

They suggest that the observer ask learners how much improvement they have had and ask them about some points they may not see in a particular session. Along with the other suggestions it is proposed that the learners' reflection of the teachers' behaviour be regarded important; that the observer ask learners' ideas and link it to the observation process.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although classroom observation is seen as an indispensable component of each language institute's educational program, it is not well received by teachers in general. This resistance to the practice of classroom observation makes a problematic contrast to the recognition

that classroom observation is an integral part of the language institutes' schedule. Before we can use classroom observation effectively as a tool for nurturing competent teachers, we need to understand the phenomenon of concern. In the first place we need to know teachers' expectation of the objectives, patterns of operation, the ways to be observed, the ways to receive feedback and other aspects related to classroom observation. Inquiring about teachers' priorities regarding different aspects of classroom observation and applying them observations will be closely related to their acceptance of the practice and will have significant implications for the future development of the practice. So, there is an obvious need to find out what teachers expect from classroom observation. The present study was conducted to serve this purpose. Specifically the study aimed at addressing the following question

- What is Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards teacher observation?

Results of the study helped us develop a new observation model totally based on the principles teachers would like to be embedded in classroom observation. By adopting the approach totally proposed by teachers, we can counter the negative attitudes that teachers have towards observation; be more objective than subjective, more interactive than directive and more teacher-centred than supervisor centred. No more teachers are slaves of authorities; no more supervisors act in a top-down process. In this way we allow teachers take much of the responsibility for the observation. This helps us move along the revolution in teacher observation practices. This model helps involve teachers in a process of action research, i.e. through a process of shared inquiry, reflection, and decision-making. They can become research teams committed to identifying and solving the inevitable problems and issues.

This model may offer particular promise for English schools and institutes. It may provide rich opportunities for teacher improvement.

The last point to remember is that we are still in the initial stages of developing a model totally based on the teachers' attitudes. This proposed model is still far from perfect; we would not claim that we have 'the answer' for the teachers' resentment toward being observed. We have an idea, which we are still in the process of developing. We are pleased that we have put a short step forward developing a kind of reflective teaching in teacher observation practices.

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### APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

#### *Teachers' attitude towards the necessity of classroom observation*

Do you think teacher observation is needed in the schools or language institutes or not?

#### *Teachers' psychological reaction to the observation*

What is your general feeling about classroom observation of teachers?

What experiences do you have?

#### *Objectives*

What do you like to be the goals of observation?

#### *Time of observation and the teachers' awareness of the time*

Do you like to know the time you will be observed?

When do you like to be observed?

In what time intervals do you like to be observed?

#### *Teachers' ideal pattern of classroom observation*

Who do you like to be the observer? (E.g. peer, mentor, self, experienced teachers)

What are characteristics of effective observers?

Where do you prefer the observer sit or stand?

#### *The way to be observed*

How do you like to be observed?

Which techniques you suggest?

(E.g. qualitative/quantitative; tape recorder/video recorder)

#### *The place and the time period the observer sits*

Where do you like the observer sit in the classroom?

How much of the class time do you like the observer stay?

*Feedback*

How do you like to receive the feedback?

When do you like the post-observation conference be held?

How do you like the post-observation conference be held?

E.g. discussion, comment, posing questions, giving feedback directly

*Received penalty*

Should be any punishment for the weak teachers? If yes, what penalties?

*Final grade*

How do you like to be graded by the supervisor?

## **APPENDIX 2: The Observation Questionnaire**

### **Dear respondent:**

This questionnaire is designed to help us understand EFL teachers' attitudes regarding the ways they like to be observed. The overall goal of the study is to develop a new model of teacher observation based on the attitudes of EFL teachers.

### **Directions:**

The following items are designed to shed light on the way you like to be observed in the school/institute you teach in. Please indicate whether you are agree with the statement by ticking "yes" , or you are disagree with the statement by ticking "no" .

**Developing a Classroom Observation Model based on ... 37**

No.	Items	Yes	No
1	I prefer both teacher evaluation and teacher improvement as the goals of observation.		
2	The observer must be an experienced language teacher.		
3	The observer must be a person with a degree in teaching English.		
4	The observer must pay attention to the positive points as well as the negative points.		
5	I prefer to be observed by my friends.		
6	I don't like to be observed by peers.		
7	I prefer to receive feedback from my observer in a negotiative manner.		
8	I prefer to receive feedback from my observer in private.		
9	I prefer to receive feedback in an informal and friendly situation.		
10	I prefer to receive feedback both in written and spoken form.		
11	I prefer to receive feedback immediately after the classroom observation.		
12	I prefer to be observed directly by the observer, not through electronical devices.		
13	I prefer the observer use an observation checklist for classroom observation.		
14	I prefer the observer write qualitatively everything happens in the classroom.		
15	I prefer to be observed by hidden camera in particular sessions.		
16	Lowering the teachers' wage can be a good penalty for weak teachers.		
17	Decreasing teachers' teaching hours can be a good penalty for weak teachers.		
18	Twice a term is a good interval for classroom observation.		
19	I prefer to be observed in the middle of the term.		
20	It is more informative for the observers to observe a full session of teaching.		
21	I prefer to know the time I will be observed.		
22	Teacher observation must be an integral part of each institute's schedule.		
23	Teacher observation causes stress in teachers.		
24	Teacher observation causes stress in students.		
25	The observer should sit in the last row of the class so as not to attract attention.		
26	I like the supervisor ask students' ideas about teachers too.		

